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EVE'S CHILDREN

The Biblical Stories Retold and Interpreted in Jewish and Christian Traditions

EDITED BY

GERARD P. LUTTIKHUIZEN

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An image of Lilith from an amulet: a nineteenth-century Persian amulet intended to protect newborns against Lilith in her aspect of baby stealer (or killer, depending on the tradition)

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GNOSTIC IDEAS ABOUT EVE'S CHILDREN AND THE SALVATION OF HUMANITY

Gerard P. Luttikhuizen

Valentinian Christians referred to Cain, Abel, and Seth as the biblical representatives of three types, or "natures", of human beings: the sarcic or material type, the psychical or "soulish" type, and the pneumatic or spiritual type. We know this from Irenaeus's report of Valentinian doctrines in the first book of his *Adversus haereses*,[1] and also from one of the fragments of the Valentinian teacher Theodotus quoted by Clement of Alexandria.[2] While it is not immediately clear from the Valentinian text preserved by Clement what was the exact meaning of the reference to Cain, Abel, and Seth in connection with three human "natures", Irenaeus's report is very definite on this point (I 6–7; cf. II 29).

A Heresiological Cliché

According to the heresiologist, the Valentinians claimed that the three natures constitute three different races of humans, and, furthermore, that these races, the lineages of Cain, Abel, and Seth, are fixed and unchangeable. Accordingly, being saved or being doomed would depend on whether one belonged to one of these lineages. The material people, who are Cain's descendants, would certainly perish ("for matter is incapable of salvation", I 6,1–2; 7,5). The pneumatics, the offspring of Seth, i.e. the Valentinians themselves, could be completely certain of their future salvation ("for the spiritual cannot be damned", I 6,2; 7,5). Irenaeus adds to this that the certainty of the

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[1] I 7,5. As indicated in the preface to book I, this report deals with the doctrines of the Valentinian teacher Ptolemy and his school. A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau, *Irenée de Lyon, Contre les Hérésies I*, vol. 1 (Sources Chrétiennes 263), Paris 1979, 116, 171.

[2] *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 54. Otherwise, the distinction between better and worse types of humans was relatively commonplace in philosophical and religious traditions in the ancient world. Cf. M.A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism". An argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*, Princeton 1996, 189, who refers to Philo and Paul.

Valentinians about their own salvation induced them to maintain that moral behaviour was of no concern to them ("it is impossible for the spiritual to suffer corruption whatever the kinds of behaviour in which one is involved", I 6,2).[3] The middle group of the psychicals, those belonging to the class represented by Abel, i.e. non-Gnostic Christians such as Bishop Irenaeus, were a special case inasmuch as they were said to have some freedom of choice: if they did good works their final destination would be the intermediate region of the demiurge (the highest part of the cosmic world). If they did not practice good works, they would share the fate of Cain's lineage.[4]

There is no hint in Irenaeus's report that the Valentinians considered the possibility of conversion or transition from one category to another. The Valentinians are depicted by the orthodox bishop as determinists and profiteers from their supposedly safe position. Interestingly, Irenaeus points to an inner contradiction in the soteriological teaching of the Valentinians as he describes it. In *Adv. haer.* II 29 he states that they "are inconsistent with themselves": if nature and substance are the means of salvation, how then, he argues, could they believe that only those psychicals who had lived righteously could attain to their destination in the intermediate world? But this observation does not cause the heresiologist to doubt his interpretation of the relevant Valentinian teaching. He explains to his readers that the fatalistic doctrine allegedly advanced by these heretical Christians would not only make righteous conduct useless, but that it also rendered the Christian faith and the descent of the Saviour into the world superfluous.[5]

Irenaeus's portrayal of the Valentinians strongly influenced later perceptions of the anthropological and soteriological ideas of these and other Gnostic Christians.[6] Clement of Alexandria, who had direct access to Gnostic texts and teachings, was familiar with Irenaeus's work.[7] The charge of determinism originally addressed by Irenaeus

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[3] Having made this point, Irenaeus proceeds to describe in some detail their supposed lascivious and libertine conduct (6,3).

[4] I 6,4 shows that, in particular, the supposed idea that psychicals, "the people of the church", had to do good works and to live in continence while pneumatics could do whatever they wished, aroused the bishop's anger.

[5] II 29,1; cf. II 14,4. W.A. Löhr, "Gnostic determinism reconsidered", *Vig. Chr.* 46 (1992), 381–90, esp. 382.

[6] It is difficult to find the charge of determinism in Justin Martyr, Hippolytus, and Plotinus. Irenaeus is quite likely the instigator of this anti-Gnostic cliché. Löhr, "Gnostic determinism", 386.

[7] A. Le Boulluec, *La notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque II^e–III^e siècles*, vol. II: *Clément d'Alexandrie et Origène*, Paris 1985, 409ff; Löhr, "Gnostic determinism" 388, n. 15.

to Valentinians was reused by Clement and applied to other Gnostics as well.[8] Thus Clement contributed to developing Irenaeus's anti-Valentinian criticism into a heresiological cliché. Origen knew the works of both Irenaeus and Clement.[9] He adduced more sophisticated theological arguments against allegedly deterministic models of salvation history,[10] and he included Marcion among the champions of such a doctrine.[11]

The clue to this understanding of Gnostic soteriology is the Valentinian notion of "being saved by nature (φύσει σῴζεσθαι)".[12] However, it is questionable whether the Valentinians understood this notion to mean that they possessed the pneumatic element or nature on account of their belonging to the natural lineage of Seth, and that this inherited possession was the one and only cause of their being saved. It is noteworthy that, according to Clement, their speaking of "being saved by nature" did not prevent the Valentinians from believing that salvation can result from obedience and repentance.[13] Furthermore, in one of the fragments quoted by Clement, the Valentinian teacher Theodotus states that the psychic and spiritual components of humanity are not transmitted ("sown") in the same way as its material part, for, he comments, in that case "all humans would be equal and righteous and in all there would be the teaching" (i.e. the teaching of the Gnostic truth).[14]

The common heresiological portrayal of Valentinian and other Gnostic Christians as determinists (and libertines), coined by Irenaeus and refined by the two Alexandrian theologians, underlies modern

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[8] Cf. *Strom.* II 10–11; III 3,3 (with regard to the Basilidians: because they believed they belonged to the elect race they felt free to sin); IV 89,4; V 3,3. L. Schottroff, "Animae naturaliter salvandae, zum Problem der himmlischen Herkunft des Gnostikers", in: W. Eltester, *Christentum und Gnosis*, Berlin 1969, 65–97, esp. 67f.

[9] A. Le Boulluec, "Y a-t-il des traces de la polémique antignostique d'Irenée dans le *Péri Archôn* d' Origène?", in: M. Krause (ed.), *Gnosis and Gnosticism* (Nag Hamm. Studies 8), Leiden 1977, 138–147.

[10] *De princ.* III 1,2–4; *In Joh.* XIII 10, 64; cf. E. Junod's introduction to Origen's *Philocalie 21–27, Sur le libre arbitre* (Sources Chrétiennes 226), Paris 1976, 73–90 and 110–20; A. Le Boulluec, *La notion d'hérésie*, II, 510f, n. 242; Ph.J. van der Eijk, "Origenes' Verteidigung des freien Willens in De Oratione 6,1–2", *Vig. Chr.* 42 (1988), 339–351; Löhr, "Gnostic determinism", 385 with n. 28; H.S. Benjamins, *Eingeordnete Freiheit. Freiheit und Vorsehung bei Origenes*, diss. Groningen 1993.

[11] A. Le Boulluec, *La notion d'hérésie*, II, 510f with n. 243; Löhr, 385.

[12] Cf. Clement, *Exc.Theod.* 56,3: Τὸ μὲν οὖν πνευματικὸν φύσει σῳζόμενον.

[13] *Strom.* II 115; L. Schottroff, "Animae naturaliter salvandae", 84f.

[14] *Exc. Theod.* 56,2; M.R. Desjardins, *Sin in Valentinianism*, Atlanta 1990, 35. We already noticed above that it is unclear how in these fragments, Cain, Abel, and Seth are connected with the supposed sarcic, psychic, and spiritual aspects of humanity.

understanding of Gnostic anthropology and soteriology. It is repeated in scholarly discussions[15] as well as in more popular presentations.[16] However, as recent studies have demonstrated, the authentic Gnostic texts rediscovered in the last centuries, in particular the Nag Hammadi writings, do not confirm this widespread picture.[17] We find in these texts, among other things, a preference for a strict ascetic lifestyle,[18] ethical exhortation,[19] awareness of the need for outside redemption,[20] summons to spread the Gnostic truth in the world,[21] attitudes, issues, and concerns that are hardly compatible with a deterministic model of salvation.

Two Gnostic writings, *The Apocryphon (Secret Book) of John* and *The Hypostasis (True Nature) of the Archons*, deserve closer examination because they speak in more detail about Cain, Abel, and Seth. *The True Nature* also refers to a daughter of Eve, Norea. In both texts, the stories form part of a narration of the creation and the earliest history of humanity. The contents suggest that we are dealing with an early non-Valentinian type of mythological gnosis.[22] In our discussion of the relevant texts, we will pay special attention to the ques-

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[15] Notably in the works of leading scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann (cf. e.g. his *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, Göttingen 10th ed. 1964, 41, 96f n. 5, 114 n. 2) and Hans Jonas (*Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, I, Göttingen 1934, 236, II/1, 1954, 29–31).

[16] Michael Williams: this widespread picture is "a treasured caricature that has provided countless hours of intellectual satisfaction", *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*, 189.

[17] Cf. in particular the publications by Schottroff, Löhr, Desjardins, and Williams mentioned above, S. Pétrement, *Le dieu séparé: les origines du gnosticisme*, Paris 1984 (ET: *A Separate God. The Origins and Teachings of Gnosticism*, San Francisco 1990), A.H.B. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy. A Study in the History of Gnosticism*, Edinburgh 1996, M.A. Williams, *The Immovable Race*, Leiden 1985, and *Rethinking Gnosticism* (above, n. 2).

[18] But F. Wisse, "Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt", in: B. Aland, *Gnosis. Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, Göttingen 1978, 431–40, argues that asceticism is not a feature of Gnosticism in general but of the Nag Hammadi collection of Gnostic and other books which was used by Pachomean monks.

[19] Cf. e.g. the concluding words of *Orig. World* (Nag Hamm. Cod. II,5) 127,16f: "by his *praxis* and his *gnosis* each one will make his *physis* known"; *2 Log Seth* (Cod. VII,2) 61f.

[20] According to *Tract. Trip.* (Nag Hamm. Cod. I, 5) 124,32–125,11, a Valentinian text, everybody in this world needs redemption through Christ. Desjardins, *Sin in Valentinianism*, 85.

[21] An interesting case is the *Letter of Peter to Philip* (Nag Hamm. Cod. VIII,2), esp. 132,20–133,1; 137,6–9 and 22–25.

[22] In scholarly literature, the non-Valentinian mythological gnosis of *The Secret Book* and related texts is designated in various ways. My preference is for the term "demiurgical Gnostic". A significant feature of this type of gnosis is the highly negative view of the creator of the physical world. In Valentinian texts we find a less negative view of the demiurge.

tions of how Eve's children are related to later generations, and what these stories tell us about the soteriological ideas of the Gnostics.

The Secret Book of John

The Secret Book claims to contain a revelation granted by the exalted Christ to his disciple John.[23] In the first main part, the Saviour reveals to John the Gnostic truth about the Invisible Spirit, the fully transcendent God, and about the tragic events leading to the coming into existence of an inferior cosmic Godhead who is called Yaldabaoth. This inferior God is imagined as the head of many cosmic powers. In the first quotation below he is designated by the Gnostic Christ as "the Chief Ruler".

In the second part of his revelation, Christ speaks about the creation of Adam and Eve, about the birth of Eve's children, and about some episodes in the history of the first generations. In this part of the text we find frequent references to biblical narrative materials, mainly from the first chapters of Genesis. What is striking is that the allusions to biblical traditions are alongside serious criticism and even explicit rejection of these same traditions.[24] This critical approach first of all concerns the biblical God. In *The Secret Book* he is not identified with the Invisible Spirit but with the inferior demiurgical God Yaldabaoth.

(*Cain and Abel*)
The Chief Ruler saw the virgin who stood by Adam, and that the luminous Reflection of life had appeared in her. And Yaldabaoth was full of ignorance.[25] And when the Providence of the All noticed it, she sent some (angelic powers) and they snatched life out of Eve. And the Chief Ruler defiled her and begot in her two sons; the first and the second (are) Eloim and Yave. Eloim has a bear-face and Yave has a

[23] We know this writing from no less than four Coptic manuscripts. The Nag Hammadi collection includes three copies (II,1; III,1; IV,1). A fourth copy is contained in the so-called Berlin codex (*BG*). *BG* and III,1 have a shorter, II,1 and IV,1 a longer version of the text. An early Greek version of the first part of *The Secret Book* is quoted or summarized by Irenaeus in his *Adv. Haereses* I 29. This version is not of direct relevance to us because the stories about the first generations of humankind are found in the second part of the text. The Greek version is important, however, for the dating of *The Secret Book*. Irenaeus composed his anti-heretic work around the year 180. We can be sure, therefore, that the original Greek text was written several decades at least before the end of the second century.

[24] Cf. the recurring formula, "It is not as Moses said . . . but . . ." (*BG* 45,8–11; 58,16–19; 59,17–19; 73,4–7 and parallel passages).

[25] The short version adds: "so that he wanted to raise up a seed from her".

> cat-face. The one is righteous, but the other is unrighteous. Yave he set over fire and wind, and Eloim he set over water and earth. These he called with the names Cain and Abel with a view to deceive.
>
> Up to the present day, sexual intercourse continued due to the Chief Ruler. He planted sexual desire in her who belongs to Adam.[26] And he produced through intercourse the copies of the bodies (. . . .). And the two rulers he set over powers so that they might rule over the tomb.[27]

In this Gnostic revision of the biblical stories, Eloim-Cain and Yave-Abel are sons of the demiurgical God, "the Chief Archon" Yaldabaoth. Their mother is not Adam's consort, the spiritual Eve,[28] for we are told that representatives of the true God had removed Life[29] from Eve when Yaldabaoth approached her. Her sarcic and psychic aspects were left.[30] Eloim-Cain and Yave-Abel were born from an illicit union between the demiurgical God and the sarcic-psychic Eve.

According to ancient views about human procreation, the contribution of the male parent to the formation of the child is more important than that of the mother.[31] If the cosmic archon Yaldabaoth was the father, it should therefore not surprise us that the children were cosmic powers. Yaldabaoth set them over the four elements and, consequently, over the "tomb", the cosmic world, perhaps more in particular the human body, made from these elements.[32] Note

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[26] Cf. below, n. 39.

[27] Nag Hamm. Cod. II, 24,8–34; apart from a few minor alterations I adopt the translation by M. Waldstein and F. Wisse, *The Apocryphon of John, Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV,1 with BG 8502,2*, Leiden 1995, 136–141 (= synopsis 63–65).

[28] According to *The Secret Book*, Eve was created from the spiritual light power that the demiurgical God had breathed into Adam. *BG* 58,10–60,16 and parallels (Waldstein and Wisse, synopsis 59–62). Cf. my article "The creation of man and woman in *The Secret Book of John*", in: G.P. Luttikhuizen (ed.), *The Creation of Man and Woman. Interpretations of the Biblical Narratives in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (TBN 3), Leiden 2000, 140–55, esp. 151–55.

[29] The association of Eve with "life" may reflect Gen. 3:20 LXX: Adam called his wife "life (ζωή)" because she was the mother of all the living.

[30] According to the preceding narrative of the creation of humanity, human beings not only have a sarcic but also a psychic body. The spiritual element ("the power of the Mother", Sophia) was breathed into the psychic body (the soul) of Adam.

[31] Aristotle taught that the male parent provides the form, the mother the matter of the child (*Gen. anim.* 729a–730a). This idea was widely accepted in antiquity. Cf. I.S. Gilhus, "Gnosticism: A Study in Liminal Symbolism", *Numen* 31 (1984), 106–28, esp. 112.

[32] Cf. *BG* 54,11–55,13 and par. passages (Waldstein-Wisse, synopsis 55–56) for the creation of Adam's sarcic body from the four elements. The story ends with the exclamation: "This is the tomb of the form of the body with which they (II 21,11: "the robbers") clothed the man as the fetter of matter (ὕλη; or λήθη, forgetfulness)!"

that *The Secret Book* does not mention that Abel was killed by his brother. This prominent feature of the Genesis account is omitted in the Gnostic story, apparently because Abel-Yave is seen as a cosmic power who, together with his brother Cain-Eloim, is still controlling the "tomb" of the sublunary world.

The first names of the two cosmic sons of the Demiurge are Eloim and Yave.[33] The long version suggests that it was Yaldabaoth who gave them the names Cain and Abel, and that he did so with a view to deceiving humanity: those who did not understand their demonic nature ran the risk of being exposed to their enduring power. The theriomorphic description of the two cosmic rulers—Eloim-Cain is bear-faced, Yave-Abel cat-faced[34]—is in line with the earlier description of their father as a lion-faced serpent.[35]

Sexual intercourse between divine males and human females was a well-known topic in Greek tradition, but it is quite possible that the words spoken by the biblical Eve after the birth of Cain (Gen. 4:1), "I have gotten a man through the Lord (or: through God; LXX: διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ)", and Jewish speculations about this statement, contributed to the idea that Cain was a son of the demiurgical God.[36] Incidentally, the story of Eve's being raped by a superhuman figure (the Devil disguised as a serpent or the demonic Demiurge) has some features in common with the biblical story of the intercourse between heavenly beings (sons of God or angels) and "the daughters of men" (Gen 6:1f). Both traditions speak of an intercourse between superhuman and human beings, and, in both cases, this illicit union causes moral decay in humanity.

The qualification of Eloim-Cain and Yave-Abel as righteous and unrighteous might reflect Jewish speculations about the divine names

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[33] In II 10, 34–36, Cain and Abel are mentioned among the rulers of Zodiacal constellations.

[34] In the shorter version, Eloim has the cat-face and Yave the bear-face. In *The True Nature* (II 87, 29) the archontic rulers also have animal faces.

[35] II 10,8–9 (Waldstein and Wisse, synopsis, 25). Cf. H.M. Jackson, *The Lion that Became Man. The Gnostic Leontomorphic Creator and the Platonic Tradition*, Atlanta 1985, 34–39.

[36] See L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, I, 105–7, V, 132–5; A.F.J. Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature*, Leiden 1977, 7–10, 16, 21, 28–30; G.A.G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology*, Leiden 1984, 47–49; B. Pearson, "The Figure of Seth in Gnostic Literature" and "Cain and the Cainites" in: id., *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, Minneapolis 1990, 52–83 and 95–107. See further the contributions to the present volume by Van Ruiten, García Martínez, Teugels, and Poorthuis.

Elohim and Jahweh, God and Lord.[37] But whereas in Jewish tradition, Elohim and Yahweh are different names of the one and only God (or designations of two powers or qualities of the one God), the Gnostic authors of *The Secret Book of John* refer to two separate cosmic powers, who, as is often the case in Greek mythology, are related to a superior cosmic God as sons to a father. It is possible, finally, that Eloim-Cain's association with the elements earth and water was derived from his biblical description as an agricultural farmer, offering fruits of the earth, and Yave-Abel's connection with fire and wind from his description as a herdsman who brought a burnt offering of sheep and their fat.[38]

The purpose of the second paragraph of the section quoted above is to give a mythological explanation of the sexual desire in human beings. Sexual desire is the moving force behind human procreation. In the view of Gnostics, the result of procreation is that the divine light substance given to Adam is scattered over ever more human beings. According to the above quotation from *The Secret Book*, sexual desire was planted in the first humans by the Demiurge.[39]

Several features of this Gnostic text are reminiscent of the Genesis story of Cain and Abel. First of all this applies to their names (Eloim and Yave as well as Cain and Abel) and to their birth from Eve. It is possible, as we have noted, that the words of the biblical Eve (or speculations about these words) contributed to the idea that Cain's father at least was not Adam but the demiurgical God Yaldabaoth. Also, their qualifications as righteous and unrighteous may reflect a biblical tradition. On the other hand, the story line and the basic

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[37] In Jewish tradition, the name Yahwe was sometimes associated with God's mercy, the name Elohim with his judgement. In Philo's allegorical explanations the name "God" is supposed to represent God's creative and beneficent power, the name "Lord" his royal and punishing power. Cf. N.A. Dahl and A.F. Segal, "Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of God", *JSJ* 9 (1978), 1–28; R. van den Broek, "Jewish and Platonic Speculations in Early Alexandrian Theology: Eugnostos, Philo, Valentinus, and Origen", in: B.A. Pearson and J.E. Goehring (eds), *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, Philadelphia 1986, 190–203, esp. 193. M. Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques. Codex de Berlin*. Paris 1984, 328, suggests that Cain-Eloim is considered righteous because his sacrifice was unbloody.

[38] Tardieu, ibid. In codex IV 38,4–6, these connections are reversed (Waldstein-Wisse, synopsis 64). According to Tardieu we are dealing here with an adaptation to the biblical text (Cain unrighteous and Abel righteous).

[39] "in her who belongs to Adam" (i.e. Eve) according to cod. II, 24, 28f; in Adam according to the three parallel texts (Waldstein-Wisse, synopsis, 65,8f). Cf. K. King, "Sophia and Christ in the *Apocryphon of John*", in: id. (ed.), *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, Philadelphia 1988, 158–176, esp. 170f.

convictions about God and humanity—the negative attitude towards the biblical God and the view of man as a *compositum* of matter, soul and divine spirit—are radically different. Within the scope of this study, our most important conclusion is that Cain and Abel—unlike Adam, Eve, and Seth (see below)—are not regarded as human ancestors or related to special types of human beings. Their connection with humanity is of a different order: Eloim-Cain and Yave-Abel are supposedly demonic rulers over the "tomb" in which humans are forced to dwell.[40]

I shall now proceed to the brief passage devoted to Seth.

> (*Seth*)
> He (Adam) knew his essence (*ousia*) which was like him. He begot Seth. And just as the race which is above, in the aeons, thus the Mother sent down the one who is hers: the Spirit came down to her to awaken the essence which is like him (i.e. like the Spirit), after the model of the perfection, in order to awaken them from forgetfulness and the wickedness of the tomb.[41]

Seth was essentially different from Cain and Abel. It is possible, once again, that words of the biblical Eve suggested this idea to the Gnostic myth-tellers. Gen. 4:25 reports that when Eve had given birth to her son Seth, she said: "God has raised up for me "another seed" (LXX: σπέρμα ἕτερον) instead of Abel." The reference to Eve as Adam's "essence (οὐσία) which was like him", means that the child was born from a union of spiritually equals. Seth belonged "essentially" to the Invisible Spirit, whereas Cain and Abel shared the nature of the demiurgical God Yaldabaoth.

The report of the coming down of the Spirit is of prime importance when we try to ascertain *The Secret Book*'s model of salvation. Here we read that although the spiritual or divine "essence" which Seth received from his parents, is in him, it still has to be awakened from outside. In the short version quoted above, it is stated explicitly that this not only applies to the spiritual element of Seth himself but also to that of his posterity: "The Spirit came down (. . .) in order to awaken them (note the plural) from forgetfulness."[42]

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[40] Cf. M.A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*, 195.

[41] *BG* 63,12–64,3 (III 32,7 wrongly has *anomia* instead of *ousia*). The longer version of this part of the text is more elaborate and complex (II 24,35–25,9; IV 38,15–39,7; Waldstein-Wisse, synopsis 65–66).

[42] Cf. BG 64,3–8 and parr. passages (Waldstein-Wisse, synopsis 68,10–13): Those upon whom the Spirit of life descends (. . .) will be saved.

According to *The Secret Book of John*, all human beings are descendants of Seth and they all inherit his light substance. But not all will develop this potential. It is precisely on this point that human beings differ. The subsequent section of *The Secret Book* which speaks about various types of souls, makes this more clear.[43] In line with the above quotation no reference is made there to "natural" differences in humanity. What is more, the Gnostic Christ reveals that sooner or later everyone—also the souls that are ruled by the forces of evil—will be called.[44] But souls react differently to the revelation of the Gnostic truth. Those that react positively acquire knowledge, realize to whom they belong, and will flee from evil; those that do not will go astray and run the danger of falling into forgetfulness. We are far removed here from a deterministic type of soteriology.

The True Nature of the Archons

The text of *The Hypostasis* (or: *True Nature*) *of the Archons* is known from only one Coptic manuscript, codex II of the Nag Hammadi library. This codex also contains a copy of the long version of *The Secret Book of John*. It is generally assumed that *The True Nature of the Archons* was composed later than *The Secret Book*, probably sometime during the first half of the third century.[45]

The stories about Eve's children in *The True Nature* differ from those in *The Secret Book of John*. First of all, *The True Nature* keeps closer to the biblical text in having Abel attacked (and killed?) by his brother. In agreement with the biblical tradition, Seth occupies his place. But this does not mean, as we shall see, that he has the same descent. Furthermore, in this writing the biblical God is split up into two figures, the unrighteous ruler of Chaos who—in conformity with *The Secret Book*—is called Yaldabaoth, and the righteous ruler of the astral and planetary regions who is called Sabaoth, "the God of the forces". As a result, *The True Nature* has three different

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[43] Waldstein-Wisse, synopsis 70,16–18; 71, 8; 72, 7–9. Cf. Williams, *The Immovable Race* (above, n. 17), 166–9; *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*, 196–8.

[44] Waldstein-Wisse, synopsis, 72,7–9. Williams, *Rethinking*, 196: "in one way or another, sooner or later, *all* souls will have *access* to revealed knowledge. The differentiating factors are how quickly this takes place and whether the knowledge is finally accepted or rejected."

[45] R.A. Bullard in: B. Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7* (Nag Hamm. Stud. 20), Leiden 1989, 222.

Gods (as well as many cosmic powers): the wicked cosmic God Yaldabaoth, the righteous cosmic God Sabaoth, and the hyper-cosmic God, the Father of Truth. We shall see that in some way or another, the three Gods are related to three children of Eve: Cain, Seth, and Eve's daughter Norea (or Orea).[46]

(*Cain and Abel*)
Then the authorities (the archontic rulers) came up to their Adam.[47] And when they saw his female counterpart (i.e. the spiritual Eve) speaking with him, they became agitated with great agitation; and they became enamored of her. They said to one another, "Come, let us sow our seed in her", and they pursued her. And she laughed at them for their foolishness and their blindness; and in their clutches, she became a tree,[48] and left before them her shadowy reflection resembling herself, and they defiled [it] foully. And they defiled the stamp of her voice, so that by the form they had modelled, together with [their] (own) image, they made themselves liable to condemnation. (89,17–31)

(. . . .)

Afterwards she bore Cain, their son; and Cain cultivated the land. Thereupon (? ⲡⲁⲗⲓⲛ)[49] he knew his wife; again becoming pregnant she bore Abel; and Abel was a herdsman of sheep. Now Cain brought in from the crops of his field, but Abel brought in an offering from among his lambs. God (the God Sabaoth?) gazed upon the offerings of Abel; but he did not accept the offerings of Cain. And sarcic Cain pursued Abel his brother. And God said to Cain, "Where is Abel, your brother?" He answered saying, "Am I, then, my brother's keeper?" God said to Cain, "Listen! The voice of your brother's blood is crying up to me! You have sinned with your mouth. It will return to you: anyone who kills Cain will let loose seven vengeances, and you will exist groaning and trembling upon the earth." (91,11–30)

(*Seth and Norea*)
And Adam [knew] his female counterpart Eve, and she became pregnant, and bore [Seth] to Adam. And she said, "I have born [another] man through God,[50] in place [of Abel]."

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[46] The names Norea and Orea are used alternately, apparently for the same figure, who is Seth's sister as well as Noah's wife. Cf. B. Pearson, "The Figure of Norea in Gnostic Literature", in: *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 84–94, and I.S. Gilhus, *The Nature of the Archons*, 77–95.

[47] Adam was created by the cosmic archons, cf. below, n. 55.

[48] Cf. the mythological story of the transformation of the virgin Daphne into a tree (a laurel), retold by Ovidius, *Metamorphoses* I, 548–557. Christian authors and artists were familiar with this pagan motif. A. Hermann, "Daphne", *RAC* III, 585–93.

[49] Cf. below, n. 53.

[50] "Through God (*hm pnoute*)" is an addition to the biblical text (Gen. 4:25; cf. 4:1). The Gnostic author wishes to make it clear that not Cain's but Seth's birth was according to the will of the true God.

> Again Eve became pregnant, and she bore [Norea]. And she said, "He has begotten on [me a] virgin as an assistance [for] many generations of humankind." She is the virgin whom the powers did not defile. Then humankind began to multiply and improve. (91,30–92,4)[51]

Note that the short report of the birth of Eve's son Cain does not immediately follow the story of her being raped by the archontic powers (in the passage about Cain and Abel, I omitted *The True Nature*'s version of the Paradise story, pp. 89,31–91,11). It is therefore not fully clear to whom the pronoun "their" ("she bore *their* son", Cain) refers: to Adam and Eve, the protagonists of the preceding Paradise story, or to the archontic rulers who raped the sarcic Eve. With most commentators, I prefer the latter interpretation, chiefly because otherwise the story of the rape of the sarcic Eve by the demonic rulers would have no sequel.[52]

There is some obscurity, too, about the father of Abel. It may seem obvious that "he" ("thereupon[53] *he* knew his wife; again becoming pregnant she bore Abel") refers to Adam, but after the report of the birth of Cain from a union of Eve and the demonic rulers one would expect a more explicit mention of Abel's father.[54] If we assume that Adam is meant, the reference is to the sarcic-psychic Adam.[55]

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[51] With some minor adaptations I adopt the translation by B. Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7*, 241f and 245f.

[52] B. Layton, "The Hypostasis of the Archons", *Harv. Theol Rev.* 69 (1976), 60, and *Gnostic Scriptures*, 72, B. Barc, *L'Hypostase des Archontes*, Louvain 1980, 97f and 104f; B. Pearson, "The Figure of Seth", 58, Gilhus, *The Nature of the Archons*, 79. Differently R.A. Bullard, *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, Berlin 1970, 92.

[53] The Greek time adjunct ⲡⲁⲗⲓⲛ can be understood in different ways. If it means "once again" ("once again he knew his wife", cf. R.A. Bullard, *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 29; M. Krause in: W. Foerster, *Die Gnosis* II, Zürich 1971, 57) the implication would be that "he" (Adam) knew his wife earlier, to wit before the birth of Cain. If we understand ⲡⲁⲗⲓⲛ as "thereupon" (with Layton, cf. B. Barc, *L'Hypostase des Archontes*, 61: "ensuite"), it is not implied that Adam knew Eve before the birth of Cain.

[54] According to Barc, *L'Hypostase des Archontes*, 105f, the "he" is the God Sabaoth.

[55] That reference is made to the *sarcic-psychic* Adam can be inferred from the previous story of the creation of Adam and Eve: We are told that Adam was made by the archontic rulers as one wholly of the earth (87,26–27); then "he" (Yaldabaoth or rather Sabaoth) breathed into his face (Gen 2:7a LXX) and he came to be a "psychical" (a sarcic being with a soul; 88,3–4); finally, the Spirit saw the psychic human being, it descended and came to dwell within him so that he became a *living* soul (Gen 2:7b LXX; 88,11–16). But now *The True Nature* goes on to tell how the archontic rulers caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, opened his side and took the living woman (Eve) out of it and closed his side with flesh (cf. Gen 2:21). When the woman had left him, Adam was once again without spirit. Abel's father was the sarcic-psychic Adam, his mother was the sarcic Eve (the "shadowy reflection" of the spiritual Eve; cf. 89, 26–27, quoted above).

The other two children, Seth and Norea, however, were not born from the sarcic Eve but from her spiritual prototype.[56] This is clear from the designation of their mother as Adam's female "counterpart" or "other half". This same expression was used earlier to denote the spiritual Eve (89,18–19, quoted above).[57] No doubt Seth's father was the spiritual Adam. But it remains unclear who was the father of Norea.[58]

The spiritual Eve announces that Norea will be "an assistance for many generations of humankind". The textual basis of this statement is Gen 2:18, where it is said that Eve was created as a "helper" (LXX: βοηθός) to Adam. The idea might be that what she, the spiritual Eve, is to Adam, Norea will be to later generations of humankind. Indeed, both female figures are envisaged as bringers of true spiritual life.

The story goes on to relate that after the births of Seth and Norea, humankind began to multiply and improve (cf. Gen 6:1). This aroused the anger of the archontic rulers who decided to cause a flood and to obliterate all human and animal life (Gen 6:7). The distinction between Yaldabaoth and his dark powers on the one hand, and the righteous ruler Sabaoth on the other, is carried through in *The True Nature*'s revision of the biblical Flood story.[59] The flood was allegedly caused by Yaldabaoth's demonic forces but "the ruler of the powers", i.e. Sabaoth, attempted to save Noah, a descendant of Seth, and his children, advising him to make an ark and to set it upon Mount Sir.

The story is interesting to us because it shows how the Gnostic myth-teller is enlarging upon the concept of Norea/Orea as a spiritual helper of (Sethian) humankind. Norea wished to board the ark but initially Noah did not admit her. Thereupon she set the ark on fire and Noah had to make the ark once more. Here the story ends rather abruptly. We do not hear about later generations of "Sethians". The important thing in the present connection is that Norea is depicted

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[56] The spiritual Eve is the living woman who left Adam when the archontic rulers opened his side (89,7ff). Cf. the preceding note.

[57] According to *The True Nature*, the father of Seth (the spiritual Adam) was not the same as the father of Abel (the sarcic-psychic Adam). It is somewhat easier to understand this idea on the basis of the LXX-version of Gen. 4:25 than on the basis of the Hebrew text since the Greek text does not report that Adam knew his wife *again* before the birth of Seth. Cf. Gilhus, *The Nature of the Archons*, 24.

[58] Barc, *L'Hypostase des Archontes*, 109; Gilhus, *The Nature of the Archons*, 80.

[59] For a discussion of this story see my article "Biblical narrative in Gnostic revision", in: F. García Martínez and G.P. Luttikhuizen, *Interpretations of the Flood* (TBN 1), Leiden 1999, 109–23.

as a helper to Noah and his children, the posterity of Seth. The story suggests that descendants of Seth are free to choose between admitting and refusing the bringer of the Gnostic truth.

Another aspect of the story about Norea deserves our attention. After the Flood, Yaldabaoth and his dark forces try to delude Norea, just as they tried earlier to attack her mother, the spiritual Eve. When she cries up to the true God for help, "Rescue me from the unrighteous rulers and save me from their clutches", an angelic representative of the divine world, who is called Eleleth, appears to her and informs her of her "root", i.e. of her divine provenance, and of the nature of the dark rulers. Apparently, her divine provenance does not make Norea immune to the threats of the forces of evil, and her divine origin does not yet ensure full spiritual knowledge. She has to receive the truth about God, about herself, and about the nature of the archontic rulers through revelation. Actually, the revelation granted to her by the angel Eleleth does not yet convey the complete Gnostic insight. The angel explains to her that the full truth is reserved for her "children" who, after three generations, will receive the revelation of "the perfect Man" (Jesus Christ).[60]

Conclusions

In *The Secret Book of John*, we do not find the idea that salvation is restricted to a closed and fixed group of human beings to the exclusion of others. What we do find is the idea that in the end the innermost centre of all human souls will be saved because this element is of divine origin and nature.

According to this writing, all human beings inherited the divine nature (usually designated as "the power of the Mother", i.e. Sophia) through Seth. On the other hand, this divine element is supposedly given to Seth and to all his children as a power or potential (δύναμις).[61] Only after the Spirit came down to Seth was the divine potential in him awakened. The same will happen to his posterity. The Gnostic

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[60] In 91,2 he is called "the perfect Man", in 96,33f "the true Man".

[61] In particular in cod. III, the Greek term δύναμις is used to denote the spiritual element in humanity ("the power of the Mother"): 15,24 (also II 10,21); 18,14.18; 22,17; 23, 20; 24,6.10 (also in II 19,29); 25,2 (also in II 20,11 and IV 31,6); 29,1.18; 34,2.7 (also in II 26,12f and IV 40,29).14. In these cases *BG* always uses the Coptic equivalent. Cf. the index of Greek words in Waldstein-Wisse, 235.

Christ of *The Secret Book* emphasizes that human souls should react positively to the call from above (the coming of the Spirit to them). If they do not, they run the risk of relapsing into forgetfulness. The spiritual power or nature is not a sufficient condition for salvation. Salvation is also dependent on grace (the grace of the divine call) and choice (the wish to develop one's spiritual potential).

The story of Eve's children in *The Secret Book* is meant, too, as a warning to John's fellow-spirits (the Gnostic readers): their light power is constantly endangered by Eloim-Cain and Yave-Abel, the supposed rulers over the physical environment in which they are forced to live (their "tomb").

In *The True Nature of the Archons*, the process of salvation is presented in a similar way. Although there is more interest here in the different descents of Cain, Abel, Seth, and Norea, this idea is not elaborated into a soteriological paradigm. The children of the sarcic and the spiritual Eve, respectively, are not depicted as the natural ancestors of different generations.[62] As far as Norea is concerned, even she was endangered by the forces of darkness and she, too, was in need of revelation and redemption.[63]

In *The Secret Book* and in *The True Nature*, the light power in human beings is imagined as a potential that has to grow and develop and to be brought to perfection.[64] According to these texts, Gnostics should live lives in accordance with their spiritual nature and therefore resist the temptations of the archontic rulers. Seth and, in *The True Nature*, Norea, "the woman whom the powers did not defile", were their models.

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[62] Gilhus, *The Nature of the Archons*, 115, finds in the text "an aversion for developing fixed salvation categories dependent on birth", and argues that descent from the sarcic or the pneumatic Eve is a question of choice rather than of natural birth. Indeed on this point *The True Nature* does not deviate substantially from the pertinent views of Philo (all virtuous people are descendants of Seth, *De post. Caini* 42) and John's gospel (cf. esp. 3:3 and 8:44).

[63] But this does not mean that we are entitled to see in Norea a "saved saviour" figure, as Pearson, "Revisiting Norea", in: K. King (ed.), *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, 274f, proposes. Rather she is presented as the prototype of true humanity in the way she preserved and developed her spiritual potency.

[64] The Valentinians used other terminology to express basically the same idea: the pneumatic "seed" that was "sown" in the souls had to grow and to be "formed". Cf. *Exc. Theod.* 53, 3–5; 57,1; Schottroff, "Animae naturaliter salvandae", 91.